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Great wall divides intelligence units

By Tom Diaz
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The United States can't properly identify international terrorist threats because its intelligence data is widely split among different agencies, a key Senate aide said yesterday.

"A kind of Chinese wall has been erected between [U.S.] foreign and domestic intelligence establishments," Angelo Codevilla, an aide to the Senate Intelligence Committee for seven years, told Washington Times editors and reporters.

He also said that the Soviet Union may be feeding false information to the United States in the form of data monitored "through technical intelligence collection," and stated that the Soviets could have been aided in learning how to do that by an article Assistant Secretary of State Richard Burt wrote in 1979, when he was a reporter for the New York Times.

Mr. Codevilla — widely regarded as an expert in intelligence matters — said the "Chinese wall" between U.S. intelligence agency data banks is sometimes breached, and information is exchanged when intelligence agencies learn of a specific case of threatened terrorism.

"But the trick is discovering that the case exists in the first place," he said. "And for that, unless one wishes to wait until the case bursts upon you in some violent way, counter-intelligence analysis is necessary."

In order to conduct such analysis, he said, intelligence analysts must compare all the data available from different sources, both foreign and domestic.

"You can't do analysis or direction of any problem unless you have a sound common data base," he said. "There is nothing wrong with having 20 agencies involved, so long as all of them are working from the same deck and with some sort of central direction. In fact, there is none of that."

He gave the hypothetical example of a U.S. citizen who might travel to Mexico to engage in planning terrorist activities. Because of legal con-

straints on domestic intelligence-gathering agencies, the FBI might not have been able to open an investigation into the person. Likewise, the Central Intelligence Agency might have no reason to connect the trip to terrorist activity. As a result, no specific "case" would be opened.

"Two sets of activities — here in the United States and in Mexico City — by this one individual, if put indicate the existence of a case," he said. "But the case won't be noticed because it is not possible for the two [agencies] to get together."

Mr. Codevilla said he would not recommend merging the two agencies.

"What is needed is one place where all of the data from all of the agencies can be looked at from the perspective of counter-intelligence and counter-terrorism," he said. "But it isn't done, for bureaucratic reasons."

He cited the case of possible compromise of National Security Agency intelligence gathering as an example of a situation in which the intelligence bureaucracy has been reluctant to closely examine its own problems.

"The NSA has invested billions in computers and state-of-the-art sensing equipment," he said. "It just so happens that the other side knows a few things about that equipment and may well be taking advantage of that knowledge to pass on certain information to us in ways advantageous to them."

The super-secret NSA is known to be generally responsible for capturing and analyzing through electronic means foreign communications data, such as that sent over telephone lines, and radio and satellite transmissions.

"If there were a center of analysis independent of NSA that examined the validity of NSA sources, the wisdom of spending those billions would be questioned, further authorization for those billions would be cast into doubt and reputations might suffer," he said. "The point is that NSA wants very much to keep NSA sources evaluated by NSA people."

"And this is the case with all other intelligence agencies as well," he said. "It's not a question of national security; it's a question of bureaucratic security."

He suggested that there should be a central point of review for evaluation of intelligence-agency operations, staffed by people "who look at it objectively."

"They ought to be independent in their careers," he said. "It matters less where they are than that they exist, and that they not believe that their further advancement will depend upon the goodwill of the people whose judgment they are called upon to evaluate."

Elaborating on his suggestion that the Soviets could be deliberately feeding data to NSA, Mr. Codevilla said a series of events could have given an opening to the Soviets.

The first was the turning over to the Soviets of "quite a number of conversations intercepted by NSA" and translated by British turncoat Geoffrey Prime, convicted in 1982 of spying for the Soviet Union.

"The Soviets, having this knowledge, had good reason to examine where the leak could have come from," he said. "They first would have asked themselves, how could these conversations have been intercepted?"

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"Theoretically, they would have come up with several alternatives, including the existence of a satellite in geo-synchronous orbit," he said. "Then, in 1979, as they were examining this . . . they read a story in the New York Times that said the United States had [such] a satellite, sensitive enough to pick up telemetry, but not designed for that purpose."

He said it "wouldn't have taken an ace intelligence analyst" to figure out the satellite "may have been the thing responsible for the interception of those things that Geoffrey Prime translated."

The article to which Mr. Codevilla referred appeared in the New York Times on June 29, 1979, and revealed information about a satellite code-named Chalet.

The article featured prominently in dispute over Mr. Burt's nomination to be assistant secretary of state in 1982. Sen. Jesse Helms, R-N.C., charged that the article violated federal law.

Mr. Codevilla said the article still disturbs many conservatives and is a factor in pressure to block the rumored White House plan to nominate Mr. Burt to be ambassador to West Germany.